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## Review: 'Fighting Traffic: The Dawn of the Motor Age in the American City'

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staying power into our own era. Even skeptics will be impressed with Monroe's opening reference to recent studies indicating that "in the period between 1982 and 2000 . . . a relatively constant 47 to 54 percent of the French population professed belief in the curative powers of Mesmerism" (p. 9).

Although he offers many glances backward and forward, Monroe focuses his study on the decades between the 1850s and the 1930s. His narrative opens with a series of incidents beginning in 1853, in which French men and women inspired by trans-Atlantic tales of mysterious phenomena achieved by American spiritualists began conducting experiments with *tables tournantes*. These were tables that, under some influence emanating from people who were seated around them and joined finger to finger, turned, "slowly at first, and then with steadily increasing speed," ultimately "leading the experimenters in a circuitous path around the room" (p. 19). From this curious beginning unfolded a decades-long history that encompassed the emergence of French spiritualism and its challenge to mesmerism (Ch. 2); the "invention and development of spiritism" by the one-time teacher H. L. D. Rivail, known under the pseudonym Allan Kardec (Ch. 3); challenges in turn to spiritism, including judicial prosecution of some of its adepts in the 1870s and 1880s (Ch. 4); and the emergence in the *fin-de-siècle* of what Monroe terms "the multivalent self," a new construct positing a human psyche divided between conscious and "subconscious" elements that drew on both the "heterodox" currents of preceding decades and a hard-headed experimental psychology pursued by establishment scientists (Ch. 5). The book closes with an "Epilogue" that briefly surveys spiritualist, occultist, and assorted "New Age" movements of the interwar and postwar years and the "cultic milieu" emergent from the cultural upheavals of the 1960s.

Monroe's study is theoretically sophisticated, taking as its analytical point of origin Clifford Geertz's still evocative definition, enunciated in the 1960s, of "religion" as "a system of symbols" that surrounds its central "conceptions with such an aura of factuality that [its] moods and motivations seem uniquely realistic" (p. 4). Working from such a view, Monroe makes strong assertions about the importance of the cultural phenomena he studies, which some might be inclined to categorize as purely crackpot but which he approaches sympathetically with the help of his anthropologically inspired posture of "epistemological agnosticism" (p. 14). He urges that the marginalized elements of "French religious life" on which he focuses indicate a powerful drive in French culture to reconcile the seemingly irreconcilable claims of

faith and science and, in the process, enabled adepts to achieve myriad forms of emotional consolation, creative stimulus, and intellectual freedom from the narrow strictures of orthodox science. Engagingly written, *Laboratories of Faith* is well grounded in an extensive body of largely neglected primary sources. Cultural historians will welcome this addition to a growing literature on what we might regard as a "third France" long left in the shadow of the great combatants of the war between religion and science.

ELIZABETH A. WILLIAMS

**Peter D. Norton.** *Fighting Traffic: The Dawn of the Motor Age in the American City*. (Inside Technology.) xii + 396 pp., illus., figs., index. Cambridge, Mass./London: MIT Press, 2008. \$35 (cloth).

During the early 1960s, as the Golden Age of the automobile in America began to wane, several commentators, including Lewis Mumford, raised the critical question of whether the automobile existed for the modern city or the city for the automobile. How and when the automobile became central to urban life is deftly addressed in Peter Norton's *Fighting Traffic: The Dawn of the Motor Age in the American City*. This study is certainly one of the most important monographs focusing on the place of the automobile in American society within a historical context to appear in recent times; it interestingly supplements David Blanke's *Hell on Wheels: The Promise and Peril of America's Car Culture, 1900–1940* (Kansas, 2007). In the process of telling his story, Norton convincingly demonstrates that it was people acting within interest groups who decided how the automobile would be used; this is not a tale of a technology having an irrepressible effect on the marketplace.

Norton, who teaches in the Department of Science, Technology, and Society at the University of Virginia, blends an empirical study of a battle for urban streets with a theoretical analysis based on social constructivist theory. His effort is well balanced, clearly articulated, and fundamentally successful, with little of the dense abstract analysis that tends to drive a good number of general readers away from this kind of scholarship.

Above all, *Fighting Traffic* is an engaging story that pits a number of diverse constituencies in a struggle over who would control city streets. These groups included pedestrians, safety reformers, police, street railway and trolley interests,

downtown business associations, traffic engineers, and automobile business interests (known as “motordom”). The drama was largely played out during the 1920s, with closure by the mid-1930s.

Norton divides his work into three main sections entitled “Justice,” “Efficiency,” and “Freedom.” He generally follows a chronological scheme, beginning with a narrative of the horrific carnage that the automobile inflicted on pedestrians, and especially children, in the period after World War I and before 1925. So many deaths occurred that some cities erected monuments to the dead, similar to those in memory of the fallen from World War I. At this point, there was no doubt in the public mind that the automobile, with its excessive speed, was largely at fault. In many respects, the “Devil Wagon,” once the scourge of country folk, was a decade and a half later unleashed on urbanites. While police and the National Safety Council did some good, the problem was far bigger than anything traditional law enforcement and traffic control remedies could handle.

Subsequently, however, the focus of the problem of the automobile in the city shifted away from accidents and discord to congestion. In this regard, “progressive” Chamber of Commerce leaders secured traffic engineers to make transportation more efficient. But this solution was fragile at best, for motordom, recoiling from a drop in sales during 1923 and 1924, an attempt in Cincinnati to place governors on automobiles, and the suggestion that streets were to be shared, responded with a rhetorical drive that led to their ascendancy within less than a decade.

Ultimately, it is this public relations campaign that won the day for the automobile interests. While numerous institutions played an important part in the fight, Norton holds that Miller McClintock of Harvard University was the key to motordom’s success. McClintock was an unlikely figure, a former Chaucer scholar turned traffic expert, with the first Ph.D. in the field. Supported by Studebaker executives Paul Hoffman and Albert Russel Erskine, McClintock became the most articulate spokesperson for motordom, arguing that the automobile represented freedom and that the street should be thought of not as a public utility but, rather, as a commodity. From that point on, pedestrians were often targeted for jaywalking and assigned the blame for the majority of urban accidents. The automobile was now considered essential to the fabric of urban life and was ascendant on American city streets.

JOHN A. HEITMANN

**James G. Paradis** (Editor). *Samuel Butler, Victorian against the Grain: A Critical Overview*. xii + 423 pp., figs., bibl., index. Toronto/London: University of Toronto Press, 2007. \$70 (cloth).

If he is regarded at all within the history of science, Samuel Butler is remembered as a benighted critic of Darwin and as the proponent of a neo-Lamarckian theory of evolution. His dispute with Darwin—namely, that he was unoriginal—has been generally dismissed as cranky; while his biological speculations on genetic memory appear eccentric, even within the framework of what Peter Bowler has called the non-Darwinian revolution. This collection of essays substantially revises and enlarges our understanding of Butler. Scholars from a variety of fields—history of science, art, music, classics, and literature—have been brought together to address Butler’s wide-ranging activities as sheep farmer, journalist, novelist, photographer, painter and composer, literary critic, and science writer. The essays are of extremely high quality; they challenge us to reconsider the narrow categories within which Butler has been evaluated and to follow the real thrust of his criticism into the boundaries and power structures of Victorian intellectual life.

Butler’s unruly style, and his prevailing humor and irony, combined to produce texts in which it is often difficult to distinguish argument from parody. His “neo-Lamarckism,” with its nonprogressive development and telling examples like the hubris of corn and the willfulness of lichen, is not altogether straightforward or literal. The essays emphasize the deep irony and multiperspectival nature of all of Butler’s writing, yet two overriding concerns come through. One is about interconnections. Butler is insistent on the links between all forms of life (and matter), but his chain of being is not a strict evolutionary lineage. He explores, for example, how one body is composed of many others, which it feeds through its own decay; how the deeds of one person shape the nature of another; how the human is extended by, or integrated into, machines; how ideas are embodied and enlarged through material media such as paper and ink.

The second theme in Butler’s work is cultural power. Butler wrote scathingly about Victorian authorities and conventions, especially those of Christianity and science. He once called the man of science “the cleric in his latest development” (p. 96). But these essays reveal in Butler an underlying concern about the nature of authority itself. He shows a fascination with agency and